



Northland, 1927

WPG-49



Builder: Newport News Shipbuilding & Drydock Company, Newport News, VA

Length: 216' 7"

Beam: 38' 9"

Draft: 16' 9" max

Displacement: 2,150 tons, maximum

Rig: Sail/diesel-electric

Cost: \$865,730.00

Commissioned: 7 May 1927

Decommissioned: 27 March 1946

Disposition: Sold, served in the Israeli Navy, see below for details.

Machinery: 1 double-armature electric motor driven by 2 generators driven by 2 x 6-cylinder diesel engines.

Performance:

Maximum speed: 11.7 knots (1927)

Maximum sustained speed/endurance: 11.0 knots with 10,280 mile range

Cruising speed/endurance: 10.0 knots with 12,000 mile range

Economic speed/endurance: 8.2 knots with 18,800 mile range

Complement:

1927: 90 men, 17 officers

1945: 102 men, 18 officers

Aircraft:

1941: 1 x SOC-4

1942: 1 x J2F-5

Electronics:

1944:

Detection Radar: SC-1, SF

Sonar: QCJ-3

Armament:

1927: 2 x 6-pounders, 1 x 1-pounder

1941: 2 x 3"/50 single mounts

1945: 2 x 3"/50 single mounts; 4 x 20mm/80 single mounts; 2 depth charge tracks; 2 "Y" guns



The *Northland* in Greenland, circa 1944; [click on photo to see full-size image](#).

Cutter History:

The Coast Guard cutter *Northland*, a cruising class of gunboat especially designed for Arctic operations and built at Newport News Shipbuilding and Drydock Corp., Newport News, Va., launched 5 February 1927 and commissioned 7 May. She was originally fitted with auxiliary sails, but they were removed and her tall masts were trimmed in 1936. Prior to World War II her homeports were alternately San Francisco, Oakland, and Seattle. She served primarily on the Bering Sea Patrol, where she performed "everything under the midnight sun."

The cutters on Bering Sea Patrol were much more than symbols. They assisted in the performance of many governmental functions. For the Justice Department they enforced the law, apprehended criminals, and transported floating courts. They gathered military intelligence for the Navy Department, and carried mail for the Post Office Department. For the Interior Department the cutters carried teachers to their posts, conducted sanitation inspections, and guarded timber and game. They surveyed coastlines and regional industries for the Department of Commerce and carried Public Health Service personnel to isolated villages, otherwise without medical service.

Northland departed the West Coast in 1938 on her last Arctic cruise, after which she decommissioned. In June 1939, however, she recommissioned and transferred to Boston, Mass. to prepare for the second Byrd Antarctic Expedition. But with the eruption of war in Europe in September, she was withdrawn from the expedition and returned to Alameda, California.

In May 1940 *Northland* entered New York Navy Yard to be outfitted for special duty in Greenland. She embarked on her first Greenland Survey 20 August and visited harbors in order to determine the best location for patrol forces. The information that resulted contributed to the composition of a Greenland pilot volume as well as new charts. These were subsequently utilized in the formal organization of the Greenland Patrol, after an agreement between the United States and exiled rulers of Nazi-held Denmark was signed 9 April 1941. By that agreement Greenland was included in the United States' system of cooperative defense of the Western Hemisphere.

Northland set out 7 April 1941 on a two month cruise to assist in the South Greenland Survey Expedition. While conducting this survey she searched for victims of ships sunk in the North Atlantic. The South Greenland Patrol was organized with cutters *Modoc*, *Comanche*, and *Raritan* and the former Coast and Geodetic survey ship *Bowdoin*. A month later the Northeast Greenland Patrol was organized with cutter *Northland*, former Interior Department ship *North Star*, and *Bear*, with overall command falling on CAPT Edward H. Smith, USCG.

A month before the consolidation of the two patrols, *Northland* sighted the German-controlled Norwegian sealer *Buskoe* 12 September and sent a boarding party to investigate. *Buskoe* was taken to Mackenzie Bay, on the Greenland coast, where she became the first American naval capture of the period of emergency that preceded U.S. entry into the war. It was believed that she had been sending weather reports and information on Allied shipping to the Germans. Her capture also led to the discovery of a German radio station about five hundred miles up the Greenland coast from Mackenzie Bay. A night raiding party from *Northland* captured three Nazis at Peter Bregt, with equipment and code, as well as German plans for other radio stations in the far north.

The two Greenland Patrols were consolidated 25 October under Smith, who became a Rear Admiral and received the nickname "Iceberg." From the outset, *Northland* served as Admiral Smith's flagship. By 1943 the force had grown to include thirty-seven vessels.

Cutter *Northland* sighted and attacked a submarine in Davis Strait 18 June 1942. The presence of oil and bubbles indicated possible hits from the cutter's depth charges, but German records give no indication of a submarine sinking in this area.

In July 1944 *Northland* discovered a Nazi trawler believed to be *Coberg*, which had been fired and completely gutted by her crew. This was one of the ships suspected of carrying three separate German expeditions to Greenland. A second Nazi craft was disposed of in September after *Northland* pursued her for seventy miles through ice floes off Great Koldewey Island. The Germans scuttled their ship and then surrendered and were taken on board *Northland*.

Northland returned to the Treasury Department 1 January 1946 and remained on weather patrol duty until she decommissioned 27 March. She was sold to an American firm surreptitiously for the Israeli "underground." She then sailed for the Mediterranean in 1947. After conversion work she was renamed *The Jewish State* and she ran the British blockade of Palestine a number of times, transporting Jewish immigrants. After the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, the *Northland*, now renamed *Matzpen*, became the first warship of the new Israeli Navy. She saw action against Egyptian forces that attacked Israel by sea; shelled Tira and Tyre and then served as a training ship, then a tender to the Israeli motor torpedo boat fleet, and finished her career as an accommodations ship for the port command at Haifa.

She was decommissioned from the Israeli Navy in February, 1962 and sold for scrap.

Northland received two battle stars for World War II service.

Sources:

Robert Scheina, *U.S. Coast Guard Cutters & Craft of World War II* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1981), pp. 30-31.

Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships, Vol. V, p. 113.

Northland Cutter File, Historian's Office, Coast Guard Headquarters.

